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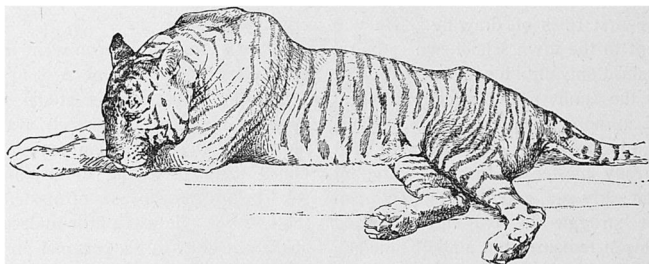
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A FRENCH DELINEATOR OF ANIMALS.

BY ALFRED DE LOSTALOT.



THREE years ago a French artist of true merit died almost without mention. His appearance in the yearly art exhibitions of Paris was scarcely noticed; he was but lightly esteemed by picture-dealers; he was, nevertheless, well known to the public, with whom he had become almost popular through the medium of books and illustrated magazines.

Slight notices have appeared from time to time of etchings by Auguste Lançon, or of a painting lost in the crowd of exhibitions, but it seems meet to-day that a closer study should be accorded this most

gifted man, whom death claimed before his talent had attained its full fruition. He was the worthiest representative in France of a school which has passed almost into oblivion,—the school of animal painters; this fact alone commands attention. Lançon has still another claim upon the consideration of France, for it is to him that she owes many strong and faithful reproductions of scenes in

her last war; there is no element of bombast in his treatment of the misery of defeat,—a style far superior to that in which pathos is so strained as to cast almost a shade of ridicule upon the woes of the vanquished.

Auguste Lançon was born December 16, 1836, at Saint-Claude, in the Jura. His father was a joiner, and it was in his own home that he taught himself the first rules of drawing. He was sent to the town school, where he remained only until his seventeenth year, as the family resources did not admit of a more extended course. Thus lightly provided with schooling, but already master of his pencil, he, at that early age, entered resolutely upon the struggle for existence. Young Lançon remained but a short time at a lithographic printing-house in Lons-le-Saulnier, where he was apprenticed, but was soon admitted to the School of Fine Arts at Lyons, not far away. A "View of Saint-Claude," drawn while Lançon was at the publishing house, impressed the general council of the Jura so favorably that an appropriation was voted to the young artist, and the sale of lithographs for business purposes increased his income sufficiently to permit the continuance of his studies at the School of Fine Arts during four consecutive years.

However numerous were the obstacles which beset Lançon at the beginning of his career, it is not surprising that he overcame them, as love of art and independence, promised as the reward of faithful effort, uplift the heart and render privation less painful. Many artists have passed through the same hardships and made their way without being vain of their success. I

will mention only one, Bracquemond, whose early career forcibly resembles that of Lançon. The resemblance extends also to the works of the two artists, which are strikingly analogous; there is the same determination to escape from the routine of schools, the same fidelity of expression, and also a certain harshness somewhat disconcerting to exclusive partisans of severely criticised works.

In 1858 Auguste Lançon went from the Lyons School of Fine Arts to the School in Paris; Picot's studio was open to him, but he scarcely availed himself of the instruction to be obtained there, preferring to install his easel before the canvases of masters at the Louvre. He was a little undecided at the outset as to his personal preference in his own composition, but his choice was soon made. While at Lyons he had painted subjects in the Italian style, and scenes illustrative of Chateaubriand's romances; at Paris, in 1861, he commenced a series of military studies and paintings of animals, which he continued until the date of his death, and these probably demonstrate the measure of his ability.

It would be superfluous to enter upon the consideration of Lançon's canvases separately; it is not as a painter that he is most interesting. He had a gloomy manner of portrayal from which he was never able to recover; he himself was conscious of this infirmity and vainly struggled to mitigate its effect upon his work: "blacking," as he called it, appeared spontaneously upon his palette and dulled all his color combinations. He did, however, leave some fine sketches untouched by melancholy; as an ar-

dent admirer of Eugène Delacroix, he succeeded in following his favorite model in the matter of sketches, but never beyond. This was the most poignant grief of his life. His artistic

Auguste Lançon's drawings and engravings have been quite widely scattered: they may be found in various French art magazines and in collections published by Hachette, Hetzel,



LION, BY LANÇON.
(From the artist's drawing)

conscience was always too exacting, tolerating neither compromise nor half-success; in his desire to bridge, honestly and worthily, the enormous space which separates the sketch from the picture, the artist was seized with vertigo and saw but dimly.

and Cadart. It is in these and not in his paintings that he has left the undeniable imprint of robust and characteristic genius. His style is a little dry, but virile withal; his compositions are well balanced, and nature is never forced to bend to his conception; it is evident

that he has given close study to all, that he has painted not only artistically but as a faithful delineator.

Many scenes have been drawn and painted of the war of 1870, and of the countless misfortunes with which France was overwhelmed at that period. Among all the artists of this fatal epoch I can recall but one whose works, after this lapse of time, merit consideration, and that is Lançon. He alone has told the truth; he alone has allowed events to speak for themselves, without mingling with their cruel eloquence personal pretensions to style or affectation of feeling, which weakens the effect. "*L'Illustration*" and "*Le Monde Illustré*" contain rapid sketches taken from life of different phases of these tragic events; the smoke of battle, the dead and wounded, burning villages, the misery of survivors, the anguish of besieged towns,—all are here. The unusual and deeply truthful tone of these sketches impressed Théophile Gautier. It will not be amiss, perhaps, to reproduce here a few lines of the article in which this talented writer has recorded his impressions:

"There is no question here of official battles, in which the staff, mounted on pawing chargers, circle round the vanquished, and where a few seemly corpses are disposed in the foreground after approved Academy style, the whole scene being relieved against a background of bluish smoke, which spares the artist the trouble of depicting troops. These are rapid sketches from life, drawn on a note-book by a brave artist following the ambulance. There is not a thing which he has not seen, nor a stroke which falsifies, neither arrangement nor composition.

It is truth in all its unforeseen horror and sinister strangeness. Such things are not invented; even the darkest imagination never conceives such scenes. M. Lançon, the artist to whom we owe these drawings, is natural. He is simple in the sense that he aims neither at style, nor form, nor the fashion in vogue. He portrays only that which he sees, and as a witness who tells his story with brevity and precision. He is to be trusted. There is a remarkable quality in these summary sketches: the subject clearly indicates the thought. Details may be lacking or merely suggested by a hasty stroke; but nothing of importance is slighted, and the impression resulting from this mode of treatment is profound and lasting. . . ."

Later, when the nightmare of war and the Commune had disappeared, Lançon undertook to transfer his memories to more finished pages. He engraved seventeen etchings in quick succession to illustrate an article by M. Eugène Véron, "*The Third Invasion*," in 1873, and during succeeding years other plates referring to the same subject; among other work, an album containing seventeen new compositions, under the title of "*War of 1870 and Siege of Paris*."

His etchings of "*The Invasion*" were exhibited in the Salon of 1873, where they received the second medal: this is the only official acknowledgment that Lançon ever received of his work.

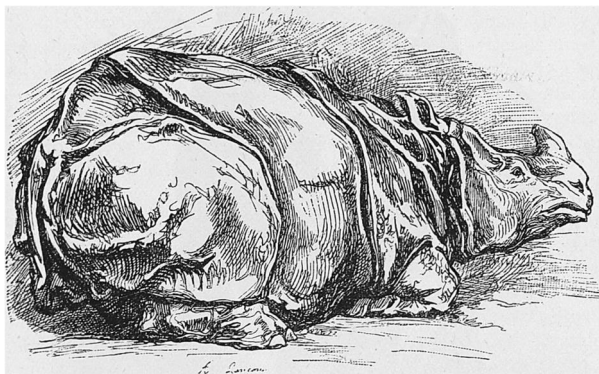
After his pictures of the war we must enumerate his works of lesser importance; these include designs of every description engraved upon wood, and etchings: street scenes from the dregs of Parisian and London life;



LIONESS, BY LANÇON.
(From the artist's drawing)

monastical scenes, among others a curious Trappist study, engraved on copper,—a series of ten plates, published in 1883. However small may be the artistic value of some of his works, none are valueless; the trace of an active and inquiring mind and never-failing originality is seen in all. Lançon could not draw without expressing something; he never indulged in a single stroke of the pencil for sim-

çon, like many others, was impatient to make use of accumulated material, and felt that duty called him to more serious endeavor; at the same time, editors, and the public whose tastes they reflect, are not easily contented with hasty work, so in order to please them work must give evidence of careful preparation,—nothing must be left to imagination. Lançon's highly-finished drawings are sometimes as good



RHINOCEROS, BY LANÇON.
(From the artist's drawing)

ple diversion: always on the alert for plastic ideas, he rapidly noted all incidents of form and movement which characterize beings and things, and which only truly talented artists know how to extricate from the chaos of details surrounding them. These rapid sketches, in which the artist confined himself to recording only what he actually saw, or rather that which impressed him most forcibly, are marked by his distinct personality.

A really great artist, however, cannot pass his life in taking notes; Lan-

as his sketches, but never in any case superior to them; his talent was not of an order that gained by labor and reflection. In his desire to correct his manner he unwittingly divested his artistic thought of a portion of the virile quality with which his first expression was clothed. Our preference is for the rough draught, however crude it may be; it attracts through its energetic expression, its harsh and angular accents, which throw the image into bold relief.

We have as yet said nothing of Lan-

çon's animal drawings, his chief work: it is to these that he owes a special and honorable place in contemporary art. It would have been well, perhaps, to review them at the beginning of this article, if only to justify our title, but we have preferred to prepare the way before speaking of them. We regard all his other works as interesting manifestations of groping talent, and regardless of chronological order we have sought in them the development of the artist. In our judgment and in that of posterity, dating for Lançon from the time of his death, he will be known as a portrayer of animals: the whole force and originality of his talent were centred in this specialty. His best paintings are his pictures of wild beasts. His models are a little cramped and the horizon limited, but he has succeeded in depicting a remarkable pride of bearing. The forms, expressed with as much energy as real knowledge, represent the animal in attitudes habitual to him. Lançon's work would have been perfect if he had been endowed with a truly artistic temperament; unfortunately, this was not the case: in his desire to reproduce the precise character of his models he was led to sacrifice fatally the charm of his painting. His finished works show scarcely a trace of the bold conceptions of color so clearly indicated in his sketches; the beautiful and harmonious tones have disappeared, and there remains only the imposing silhouette of an animal standing boldly out from the background and appearing sculptured rather than painted.

This impression is so marked that one frequently wonders in presence of Lançon's paintings and drawings if he

would not have done better to devote himself to sculpture. This thought recalls the great sculptor Barye, who at one time was possessed with the demon of painting, from which his fame gained no lustre.

Barye, in the few paintings known to us, compassed without effort all that Lançon ever succeeded in expressing in his, but his was not the painter's ambition; sculpture filled the measure of

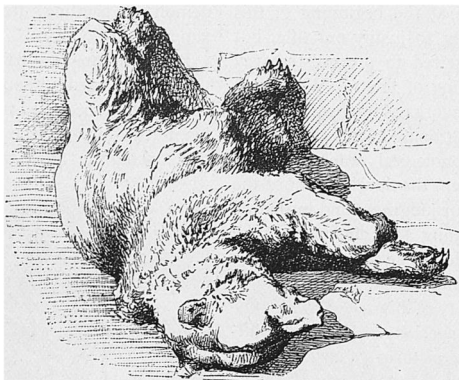


BULL-DOG, BY LANÇON.
(From the artist's drawing)

his glory, which is so resplendent that many artists have been dazzled by it, Lançon among the number. The example of this illustrious master doubtless inspired the passing incursions attempted by Lançon into the domain of sculpture. We recall two plaster groups, exhibited by him in the Salon of 1879, which received no notice: an "Egyptian Lioness" and a "Barbary Lion." His friends say that his best sculptured work does not bear his name: he is said to be the author

of a very finished model for the "Lion of Belfort," executed by M. Bartholdi. Never having seen this work of Lan-

not undervalue his other work, which gave evidence of talent in all branches; and, even better, of bright originality.



WHITE BEAR, BY LANÇON.
(From the artist's drawing)

çon's, it is impossible to determine how much credit is due to him as the author of this well-known sculpture.

Upon the whole, neither painters nor sculptors need fear Lançon as a rival claimant to renown; he owes his fame to etchings and illustrations; it is in these that he displays those qualities as observer and artist so well known to all. Although this part of his work seems so precious to us now that death has suddenly ended his career, we must

The world is prone to believe in the future of those who die at an early age. Lançon, who died at forty-eight, had had time to produce fine work; but he had not passed beyond the age of improvement. If he had lived he would perhaps have realized his ideal in painting. At all events, he has left sufficient to rescue his name from oblivion. How many painters, even among the most celebrated, are sure of living after death in their works?

